HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Washington, DC, July 29, 1998.

Senator THAD COCHRAN,
Chairman, Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation and Federal Services, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN COCHRAN: In response to the Senate's anticipated action in favorably considering H.R. 1836, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Protection Act, and in anticipation of having the measure cleared for the President without need of a conference, we write to clarify the purpose of one element of the bill: Section 5 dealing with preferred provider organizations.

As your additional views accurately represent, recent audit activity by the OPM Inspector General in response to complaints from provider associations (AMA and AHA) found no evidence that health care providers were being victimized by FEHBP carriers, nor evidence of schemes allowing payers to capture discounts to which they were not contractually entitled.

Both directed and non-directed PPOs provide various incentives to health care providers which contract with PPOs for the benefit of FEHBP—reducing health care costs. The FEHBP must continue to benefit from these relationships, recognizing that the PPOs must always have a contract with the health care provider. Silent PPO activity, as described by the OPM Inspector General, represents the type of unethical practices that FEHBP carriers should avoid. Further, we understand that the IG found no evidence of ''silent PPO'' activity within the FEHBP.

We look forward to continuing our close work in sustaining the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program as a model for others to follow.

Sincerely,

JOHN MICA,
Chairman, Subcommittee on Civil Service.
CONNIE MORELLA.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I want to thank my colleagues for their support of this important legislation. I would pick up and echo the comments of my colleague from Maryland. Indeed this is a bipartisan piece of legislation that will help all Federal employees and help us to recruit and retain physicians and others into public service which is so very, very important.

I want to again reiterate my thanks to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON), the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service; and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS). He is right. We work in a very nonpartisan way on the Subcommittee on Civil Service. This legislation is evidence of that. I thank him also for his leadership. I ask my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. PAPPAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1836, the ''Federal Employees Health Care Protection Act.''

While the legislation sets out laudable goals, I want to make clear that my endorsement of the bill is based upon my understanding that nothing in the measure is designed to hinder the types of market forces which have made the FEHBP a cost-effective health insurance model for the public agencies and private industry. This legislation is not intended to tilt the competitiveness in the health insurance marketplace in one direction or another.

One element of the legislation, Section 5, suggests as its goal the disclosure of certain rate agreements which might yield savings to plans and enrollees in the Federal Health benefits Program. I agree that FEHBP plans should be held to no lesser standard than their private sector counterparts and I agree with the clarification of Congressional intent in the drafting of Section 5 as set forth in the Senate Report's additional views filed by Senate Subcommittee chairman, Senator COCHRAN.

During our committee deliberations, issues were raised concerning the activities of ''silent PPO's'' and the potential of adverse impact their discounts could have on cost saving initiatives within the FEHBP. Some even speculated that a variety of unethical and perhaps fraudulent activities related to ''silent PPOs'' were rampant in the federal health program.

The Inspector General of the Office of Personnel Management dispelled these allegations in a report issued on February 26, 1998. The Inspector General audit found that the practices alleged are not currently prevalent in the FEHBP. The Inspector General further asserted that networks of non-directed PPOs operate within a contractually authorized environment.

PPO's play an important role in today's health care market. Both directed and non-directed PPO's provide legitimate and valuable benefits to health care providers.

I remain committed to improving the quality of health care offered to our federal employees as well as committed to ensuring a diverse and competitive environment for health plans and providers.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the bill, H.R. 1836.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendments were concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES CHILD CARE AFFORDABILITY ACT

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4280) to provide for greater access to child care services for Federal employees, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4280

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. CHILD CARE SERVICES FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—An Executive agency which provides or proposes to provide child care services for Federal employees may use appropriated funds (otherwise available to such agency for salaries) to provide child care, in a Federal or leased facility, or through contract, for civilian employees of such agency.

(b) AFFORDABILITY.—Amounts so provided with respect to any such facility or contractor shall be applied to improve the affordability of child care for lower income Federal employees using or seeking to use the child care services offered by such facility or contractor.

(c) REGULATIONS.—The Office of Personnel Management shall, within 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, issue regulations necessary to carry out this section.

(d) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this section, the term ''Executive agency'' has the meaning given such term by section 105 of title 5, United States Code, but does not include the General Accounting Office.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill, H.R. 4280, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. I want to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) chairman of the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight; the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA) chairman of the Subcommittee on Civil Service; and I also want to thank the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) the ranking member; and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) the ranking member of the subcommittee for their assistance in bringing this bill to the floor today.

I would particularly like to thank some staff who have been very instrumental in crafting it so we could finally get this bill before us, staff on both sides of the aisle. In my office Kathryn Pearson, Jeff Davis; also Gary Ewing, Jeff Shea, Siobhan McGill for all their help in bringing this bill to the floor, and the staff of the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) for the work they have done.

Mr. Speaker, I introduced this bill so that agencies may use their salary and expense accounts to help low-income Federal employees pay for child care. Balancing work and family has become increasingly difficult for families, and Federal employees are no exception. My legislation will provide opportunities for Federal agencies to help provide quality child care for their employees' children.

I have worked with the Office of Personnel Management to develop this legislation. Several agencies, including the Social Security Administration, Department of Justice, and the Department of Defense have actually requested such authority from OPM. OPM cannot grant this authority. We must legislate this change.

This legislation does not require any additional appropriations. It would be

up to the individual agencies to determine whether or not to use funds from their salary and expense accounts to help provide child care. Agencies, not employees, would make payments to child care providers to help lower-income Federal employees pay for their child care.

Such child care benefits are already being provided to military employees with a separate line item which is more than my legislation would provide. The Department of Defense, one of the agencies seeking such authority to help its employees with child care costs, has pointed out that they can provide child care benefits to their military employees but not the civil servants working side by side.

One of the greatest challenges families face, we know, is finding safe, affordable and high-quality day care. Having raised nine children and now watching them struggle with their own child care dilemmas, I am well acquainted with the problems associated with finding high-quality day care. America's lack of safe, affordable day care is not a new problem but its consequences are becoming far more dire, and it does require new, innovative solutions. In 1995, 62 percent of women with children younger than six and 77 percent of women with children between the ages of six and 17 were in the labor force.

Approximately one-quarter of all Federal workers have children under the age of six needing care at some time during the workday. During a recent hearing in the subcommittee of the gentleman from California (Mr. HORN), testimony revealed that some Federal child care facilities charge up to $10,000 or more per child per year. Many Federal employees simply cannot afford quality child care. By allowing agencies the flexibility to help their workers meet their child care needs, we will be encouraging family-friendly workplaces and higher productivity.

It is clear that we need more child care, we need affordable child care, and we need high quality child care. Unless child care becomes a priority in the private sector and in the public sector, families, including those of Federal employees, just are not going to find it.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that Congress will pursue a wide range of innovative solutions to address families' child care needs in the near future. As a Nation, we must and we can do better for our children. This legislation is an important first step. However, increasing the affordability and the quality of child care go hand in hand. That is why I am sorry that important provisions that were offered in a bill by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) to improve the quality of Federal child care centers is not still a part of H.R. 4280. I am committed to continuing to work with the gentleman from New York to enact the provisions in his bill which will ensure that all child care centers housed in Federal buildings meet quality standards. These provisions require all Federal child care centers to follow and maintain State and local regulations for health, fire and safety. They would not lower Federal agency standards if they are greater than the local or State regulations. They would simply ensure that those that are substandard begin to comply.

I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting this legislation to help Federal employees and agencies meet their child care needs.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I take this moment to congratulate the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) for this outstanding piece of legislation. It is so very important.

Three thousand nine hundred ninety-four Federal workers currently enroll their children in the 109 child care centers established in Federal agencies across the country. The cost of child care is a particular burden for low-income families. For the poorest families, child care costs on the average represent more than one-quarter of family income.

I support this bipartisan bill because it will help make child care more affordable for many Federal workers and their families as well as provide their children with developmentally appropriate environments in which to spend their days as they grow up to be productive adults.

As parents move from welfare to work and attend job training and preparatory classes, child care becomes of great concern, as is the case in my district.

At the White House Conference on Child Care in October of 1997, President Clinton asked Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin to convene a group of business and labor leaders to look at child care problems facing working parents. The group found that when employers provide quality and affordable child care, employee morale improves, turnover and absenteeism is reduced and productivity is improved. So good child care pays for itself.

Perhaps more importantly, they found a growing body of research that substantiates the view that investments in the care of young children affects a child's physical and emotional development, and these investments can have positive returns for families and society. These benefits will last those children until the day they die.

The Federal Government has taken the first steps in making such an investment. All child care facilities designed and renovated after 1992 reflect state of the art child care designs and are built to promote child-oriented, developmentally appropriate, efficient and effective environments. As the Nation's largest employer, do we not have an obligation to ensure that these facilities are more financially accessible for Federal employees?

H.R. 4280 will do the following: Allow Federal agencies to use appropriated funds to pay a portion of the costs incurred by private operators of child care centers in Federal facilities; require that such payments improve the affordability of care for lower-income Federal employees; authorize alternative methods for providing child care in Federal facilities; and will require that agencies perform a background check and a criminal history of employees of day care centers located in Federal facilities.

During full committee consideration of H.R. 4280, two amendments were added to it. The first amendment offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) would have required Federal child care centers, including the United States Congress, to follow and maintain State and local regulations for health, fire and safety. The gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) offered a second degree amendment to the Gilman amendment providing that child care facilities be inspected for, and be free of, lead hazards. Though I supported both of these amendments, jurisdictional concerns have been raised by the Committee on House Oversight, and they have been removed to ensure passage of the bill. I hope at some point in the future, the Gilman and Waxman provisions will be enacted by this body.

This bill now before us is one of many steps that the Federal Government should take to provide accessible, high-quality child care to Federal workers. Carl Sandberg said it best when he said, ''The birth of a child is God rendering his opinion that the world should go on.'' As a cosponsor of this legislation, I urge all of my colleagues to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS) who is a fierce fighter for Federal employees and cares very much about the quality of care for their children.

Mr. DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding time. After that introduction, I ought to stop right there.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great bill because it offers flexibility as a part of the benefit package to the different agencies. They can take these dollars that are appropriated, there is no new money involved, and can best decide how they can use that in recruiting and in retaining good people. Child care is a major concern for families across this country. A lot of single parents who work for the Federal Government are going to find this immeasurably benefits their performance and ability to stay on working and do their job. I remember when our day care provider at one point in our lives decided she was retiring, that she could not make enough money, and the months of scramble trying to find somebody who could fill that niche. There is no more

important decision for a single parent or parents to make than what they are going to do for their children while they are working.

This allows the Federal Government to come in and use existing dollars as a part of a benefit package for some of their lower-paid employees to allow the flexibility to try to meet those child care needs for them.

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It is going to be up to the agencies as to how they best implement that, how they can innovate, but I think this is a very, very good idea. I know my mother brought up five children, and my father, who served two tours in the State prison system, was not around, and she would have to work taking care of other people's kids and work at night. But keeping that family together was the most important thing in her life, and it allowed her to go off and be productive and be successful in other things. This will allow that same standard to Federal employees.

We are finding the work force today across the world in an information age is the most important asset that any organization has. It is no longer the machinery or the equipment; it is the employees and their minds and what they bring to bear. This basically allows us to recruit and retrain the best and the brightest by allowing them flexibility to care for their day care needs, something that is very important, something at a governmental level we have been behind the private sector in recognizing how important this is to be able to recruit and retrain good people. And I am very confident that with the passage of this act, as we start meeting and talking to Federal agencies, as they start hearing from employees, both single parents and working parents about how important child care is, that this will allow the flexibility that our agencies need to meet the needs of employees that they are trying to recruit or retrain.

So I am very bullish on this bill. I want to thank everybody involved. Keeping families together is important, but keeping and recruiting and retraining and being able to retain quality employees is also important from a taxpayer perspective, and this legislation does this.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for having yielded to me, and I hope my other colleagues will support this legislation.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4½ minutes to the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) who has constantly been at the forefront of making sure that our children are uplifted.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his kindness and for yielding this time to me, and I would like to thank the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) both for working so closely together on what is clearly a ground-breaking piece of legislation, though it affects a smaller universe than our country needs.

One of the reasons I am thrilled with this bill is that the bipartisan Congressional Women's Caucus made child care one of its seven priorities this year, focused on seven priorities; six of them were actual bills; four of the seven, in fact, have been enacted, which is not a bad track record; and it has encouraged us as a caucus, now 21 years old, to focus on specific legislation of the kind that we think has a consensus in this body.

Now, of the three that did not get through, one was child care. All were fairly complicated. The ones that were fairly easy did get through. Child care was difficult this term, and we knew it. We could not get a consensus on one bill, but we got consensus on three principles:

One, that funding would go to lower-income families; two, that there would be tax relief for working families and for stay-at-home spouses; and three, that there would be quality child care. Any bill that incorporated those three principles would have our support.

As we know, we were unable to get a comprehensive child care bill through. That is why I am thrilled that at least that there will be a child care bill that passes the 105th Congress. The Federal Employee Child Care Affordable Act gives us something to show for child care in this session.

Now, my chief regret is that the Gilman and Waxman provision was not incorporated into this bill as it originally was because that would have meant that one of our three principles, quality, would have been memorialized in an important bill. This provision would have had Federal child care centers comply with Federal or State safety and health standards, whichever is higher, and all Federal centers would have to be free of lead paint. I believe, Mr. Speaker, I can say without fear of being contradicted that there is not a Member in this body who would disagree with the provisions of the Gilman and Waxman bill, but the fact is that a jurisdictional dispute has derailed it, and I was pleased to hear the gentlewoman saying she will follow up next session to make sure that this provision also is passed.

This in other ways is a model bill. This is a model bill in the flexibility it allows in meeting child care needs. I am inclined to say to the gentlewoman from Maryland that in a real sense it is making lemons out of lemonade because there is no extra money in this bill, it is a no-cost bill that leaves discretion to the agency to decide where to use its money, and when we have a lot of employees who look like they are not on time or they are not being productive for child care reasons, that may be the best use of discretionary funds. This will go to lower-income people who cannot afford the child care.

Mr. Speaker, I can say to my colleagues that when I was a young mother with two youngsters, I remember at one point having the need of both my mother-in-law and someone who helped me in the house. The mother-in-law went to pick up the child from nursery school, and the lady in the house stayed with the other child. I still have not figured out how low-income mothers do it, particularly single parents.

Mr. Speaker, with its Federal child care centers the Federal Government surely ought to be in the forefront of child care. With this bill, it moves in that direction, and this legislation is in the progressive tradition of the Federal Government staying ahead of other employers in important matters to its own employees.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN), the Chairman of the Committee on International Relations, who has put so much time into child care and high-quality child care.

(Mr. GILMAN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Maryland for yielding this time to me.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of H.R. 4280, the Federal Child Care Affordability Act, and I want to thank the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) for her leadership and dedication to child care. This bill allows Federal agencies to help their employees with the ever-growing cost of child care in our Nation. Recent hearings have illustrated that some day care centers charge up to $10,000 or more for a single year of child care, and for some employees that is an outrageous charge, and they are forced to choose more affordable, but not necessarily quality care facilities.

Miss MORELLA's language will allow Federal agencies to use already appropriated funds, no additional costs, already appropriated funds to help these employees pay for child care, something that the Department of Defense already does for its employees, and these provisions are supported by both conservative and liberal groups alike in addition to GSA and the executive branch agencies and nationally recognized accreditation groups including the National Council on Private School Accreditation and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Mr. Speaker, our children are so important, and the care they receive during their first few years of development is essential to raising intelligent and productive members of our society, and I want to thank the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) for noting the need for our proposed amendment, an amendment that has been proposed by both the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) and myself which provides regulations for safety and for qualified personnel, which regrettably

at the moment is being held up by a jurisdictional question and which hopefully can soon be resolved. I think that that is an essential part of all of this to make certain that whatever child care facilities we utilize, that they are going to be safe and that they are going to be staffed by qualified people.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues to fully support the Morella measure, H.R. 4280.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN), someone who also has been at the forefront of making sure that Federal employees receive equity and parity and that our children be lifted up.

Mr. MORAN of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the very distinguished gentleman representing Baltimore for his leadership with regard to Federal employee issues, and particularly with regard to the children of Federal employees, and I thank the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) for her initiative on this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Federal Employee Child Care Affordability Act to allow Federal agencies the discretion to use their salary and expense accounts to provide child care for their employees.

As my colleagues know, between 1975 and 1994, over a 20-year period, the number of women in the labor force with children under the age of 6 increased from 39 percent to 60 percent. Unbelievable, 60 percent of women in the labor force have children under the age of 6. More than half of children under 1 year of age and more than 12 million children under the age of 5 are regularly in the care of someone other than their parents.

A recent study suggests that one-quarter of all Federal employees need child care. That means we are talking about hundreds of thousands of parents and their children. Access to quality affordable child care has become a number one issue for many parents in the United States, particularly Federal employees. So, as a responsible employer, the Federal Government should be working to improve access to and affordability of child care for its employees.

In Congress we have been working to find ways to encourage private businesses to do just that. We are not doing a bad job. There are 1,400 private employer-provided child care centers throughout the United States. By comparison, the Department of Defense has 850 centers for its employees and another 230 more for civilian DOD employees. We can do much better by allowing all Federal agencies to provide child care assistance to all their employees.

In exchange for being a responsible employer, we also have the added bonus of increased productivity by decreasing missed work hours for child care crises, and the lure of quality affordable child care is a recruitment and retention tool to the most qualified applicants and employees of the Federal Government. DOD has been successful in providing sliding scale fee care on location to parent employees, but other Federal agencies have been strictly prohibited from funding such a program even by simply providing an onsite facility with electricity or furnishings.

The Morella amendment would not force agencies to provide care, but would allow agencies to use their funds at their own discretion to provide care or tuition assistance. Because the amendment does not require an additional appropriation, it does not impact the balanced budget, and, in addition, any profits to the facility will be used to make care more affordable for lower income employees.

Mr. Speaker, it is a well-thought-out amendment.

Over the past several years we have made tough choices along with great progress in achieving fiscal responsibility in the budget. Along with this responsibility we have asked the private sector to do their part in being responsible citizens, particularly as employers by providing benefits such as child care to their employees. It is time for the Federal Government to step up to our responsibility as employers by allowing Federal agencies the discretion to provide child care to their employees, and I urge my colleagues to take this responsibility seriously by supporting the Morella-Cummings-Moran amendment. It is the right thing to do.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, you can see the extent of the passion and the interest in such an important issue as child care for Federal employees.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from California (Mr. LEWIS).

Mr. LEWIS of California. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to mention to my colleague that she may be kind of interested to note that I had the privilege of being the author of the Child Development Act of 1972 in California. Congress has discovered child care 25 years later.

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that a letter sent from the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) be included in the record.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Maryland?

There was no objection.

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Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken today, my colleague, the gentleman from Maryland, who is handling this bill who is a cosponsor and a very strong advocate who has worked with us, and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MICA), the chairman of the subcommittee. I wanted to thank the chairman of the full committee also and the ranking member of the full committee and also all of the members who have spoken here today and those who are submitting statements and are very supportive of this legislation.

Certainly the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) has demonstrated leadership consistently, and I know that his legislation with all of our help will ultimately become law. The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS) has spoken, the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) and, indeed, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. MORAN) and the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS).

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to thank the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) and the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), the ranking member, and certainly the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA). I want to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. GILMAN) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) and all of those who have taken part in this discussion today.

I think that when we just see the Members of Congress who have come here today to the floor to speak on this issue, it is clear that it is again a bipartisan effort, an effort to reach out and touch children, children who, in many instances, cannot fend for themselves and cannot speak for themselves, but yet and still they are our most important resource.

I think it is that spirit that brings this legislation to the floor of the House today. It is that spirit that has garnered a bipartisan effort, and it is that very spirit that should allow and make feel good every Member of Congress when they vote for it. I certainly urge all of us to do so.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill today. H.R. 4280 is an extremely important bill for our families and for our children. This bill will allow federal agencies to use their salary and expense accounts to help federal employees pay for child care.

This bill does not require any additional appropriations, it simply requires a commitment on our part, as responsible legislators who care about our future, to ensure that our federal government employees receive the same benefits, the same benefits, the same access to affordable child care that our military emplyees receive. Not only will this bill provide employers with the authority to help its employees with child care costs, it will also improve the quality of our federal child care centers by requiring that these centers follow and maintain state and local regulations for health, fire and safety.

We know that ¼ of all federal workers had children under age six requiring child care during their parents' work day. Some federal child care facilities charge up to $10,000 a year per

child! We must vote to help many of our federal employees who are caught in a serious child care crunch!

All parents want to provide their children with the best quality care they can. I hope you will vote to allow federal agencies and federal employees to meet their child care needs.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of H.R. 4280, the Federal Employee Child Care Affordability Act. I supported a version of this bill, the Morella amendment, on June 14, 1998, when it came up as an amendment of H.R. 4104, the Treasury-Postal Appropriations Act of 1999. The amendment was to permit federal agencies to use their salary and expense accounts to help federal employees pay for child care. I am pleased to support it again.

The lack of reliable child care was an issue before the passage of welfare-to-work reform. Now, it has become more urgent than ever. We are realizing the effects that we feared when welfare reform passed in August 1996. The welfare reform package drastically lacks the support systems necessary to help welfare recipients in transition. In California alone, for example, 200,000 children of working poor families are already on a waiting list for child care. In addition, the parents of nearly 950,000 children who currently receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) assistance will be expected to join the work force in the next few years. This means that nearly one million additional children may be without child care.

In addition to women going from welfare to work, the overall number of working women is increasing. By the year 2006, it is estimated that 61.4 percent of women will be at work. Between the 1986–96 period, slightly more men than women entered the labor force, 52 percent compared with 48 percent. Forty-six percent of all workers today are women, up from 44 percent in 1986. In the 1996–2006 period, women and men are expected to enter the labor force in equal numbers.

For anyone who has had to find child care or knows of someone who needs child care, the story is familiar: there is a severe shortage of reliable child care with necessary educational, physical, and nurturing standards at an affordable cost.

Though child care workers are among our poorest paid, Federal child care still may cost up to $10,000 a year. I put myself in the position of a young woman, head-of-household, whose median salary is $19,752 a year. I would have to pay half of my pre-tax salary for child care. How do my children and I survive?

H.R. 4280 is a real winner in that it provides part of the solution. H.R. 4280 addresses this continuing crisis in finding adequate child care by allowing federal agencies to use their salary and expense accounts to help low-income employees pay for child care. This bill has an extra bonus in that it will not need additional appropriations. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Ms. DEGETTE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Maryland, Mr. CUMMINGS, and my friend from Maryland, CONNIE MORELLA, for moving this important legislation to the floor. I am pleased that we are considering this so quickly after it was struck down by a point of order in the House version of the Treasury-Postal appropriations bill.

H.R. 4280 is a simple piece of legislation that would permit the Office of Personnel Management to redraw its regulations so that all federal agencies can use existing funds to subsidize child care costs for federal employees. It's a shining example of the old saying, ''a little goes a long way.'' Lower-income employees all around the country will be able to obtain the necessary assistance to seek out and pay for local child care programs.

H.R. 4280 does not legislate new federal child care programs or require additional appropriations.

At a time when child care costs often exceed $10,000 per child per year, and at a time when employers are fast becoming aware that good child care means higher productivity on the job, this bill is good government.

In my district, The Denver Federal Center is situated comfortably at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, about one-half hour away from downtown Denver, Colorado. Roughly 5,500 federal employees are employed at this facility, many of whom are raising small children. This bill would make a simple but profound change in the lives of these individuals—it would make quality child care for their children more affordable.

Today we should recognize the importance of quality child care to the positive development of our children and we should take this opportunity to make a straight-forward, administrative change to government practice. It's a small, but important change.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4280, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 4194, DEPARTMENTS OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1999

Mr. LEWIS of California (during debate on H.R. 4280) submitted the following conference report and statement on the bill (H.R. 4194) making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes:

CONFERENCE REPORT (H. REPT. 105–769)

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4194) ''making appropriations for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes'', having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to recommend and do recommend to their respective Houses as follows:

That the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate, and agree to the same with an amendment, as follows:

In lieu of the matter stricken and inserted by said amendment, insert:

That the following sums are appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, and for sundry independent agencies, boards, commissions, corporations, and offices for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes, namely:

TITLE I—DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

COMPENSATION AND PENSIONS

(INCLUDING TRANSFERS OF FUNDS)

For the payment of compensation benefits to or on behalf of veterans and a pilot program for disability examinations as authorized by law (38 U.S.C. 107, chapters 11, 13, 18, 51, 53, 55, and 61); pension benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by law (38 U.S.C. chapters 15, 51, 53, 55, and 61; 92 Stat. 2508); and burial benefits, emergency and other officers' retirement pay, adjusted-service credits and certificates, payment of premiums due on commercial life insurance policies guaranteed under the provisions of Article IV of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940, as amended, and for other benefits as authorized by law (38 U.S.C. 107, 1312, 1977, and 2106, chapters 23, 51, 53, 55, and 61; 50 U.S.C. App. 540–548; 43 Stat. 122, 123; 45 Stat. 735; 76 Stat. 1198), $21,857,058,000, to remain available until expended: Provided, That not to exceed $24,534,000 of the amount appropriated shall be reimbursed to ''General operating expenses'' and ''Medical care'' for necessary expenses in implementing those provisions authorized in the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990, and in the Veterans' Benefits Act of 1992 (38 U.S.C. chapters 51, 53, and 55), the funding source for which is specifically provided as the ''Compensation and pensions'' appropriation: Provided further, That such sums as may be earned on an actual qualifying patient basis, shall be reimbursed to ''Medical facilities revolving fund'' to augment the funding of individual medical facilities for nursing home care provided to pensioners as authorized.

READJUSTMENT BENEFITS

For the payment of readjustment and rehabilitation benefits to or on behalf of veterans as authorized by 38 U.S.C. chapters 21, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 39, 51, 53, 55, and 61, $1,175,000,000, to remain available until expended: Provided, That funds shall be available to pay any court order, court award or any compromise settlement arising from litigation involving the vocational training program authorized by section 18 of Public Law 98–77, as amended.

VETERANS INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES

For military and naval insurance, national service life insurance, servicemen's indemnities, service-disabled veterans insurance, and veterans mortgage life insurance as authorized by 38 U.S.C. chapter 19; 70 Stat. 887; 72 Stat. 487, $46,450,000, to remain available until expended.

VETERANS HOUSING BENEFIT PROGRAM FUND PROGRAM ACCOUNT

(INCLUDING TRANSFER OF FUNDS)

For the cost of direct and guaranteed loans, such sums as may be necessary to carry out the program, as authorized by 38 U.S.C. chapter 37, as amended: Provided, That such costs, including the cost of modifying such loans, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, as amended: Provided further, That during fiscal year 1999, within the resources available, not to exceed $300,000 in gross obligations for direct loans are authorized for specially adapted housing loans: Provided further, That during 1999 any moneys that would